

Testimony of Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04)
Committee on Natural Resources Member Day Hearing
Tuesday, June 4, 2019; 10:00 AM

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and other Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I appreciate the Committee providing this opportunity for Members to bring our legislative priorities before you today.

As the Chair of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, there are many issues under this Committee's jurisdiction that I look forward to working with you to address. From protecting our public lands and finding innovative solutions to the backlog of maintenance in our National Parks to addressing climate change and reducing pollution, we have many priorities to address for the American people.

I also want to thank the Committee for including a bill I have sponsored for one of Minnesota's tribal nations in a legislative hearing later this week. H.R. 733, the *Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act*, would restore a portion of the land that was illegally taken by the federal government from Leech Lake Band members during the tribal allotment era. I look forward to working with this Committee to move this legislation forward.

But today I am going to focus my testimony on an issue of pressing importance for all tribal nations, and one that I know has strong bipartisan support on this committee: Advance Appropriations for Indian Programs.

The 35-day government shutdown highlighted the clear need for advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service and for the Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Education. Basic everyday needs like tribal justice services, health clinics, and social services for children, families, and seniors went unfunded, putting Native American communities at risk. The federal government has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure funding for our trust and treaty responsibilities is not interrupted by delays in appropriations.

Earlier this year, I joined a former Chair of this Committee, Congressman Don Young, to introduce a pair of bipartisan bills that would authorize advance appropriations for essential tribal services funded by the federal government. I want to thank Mr. Young for his leadership and collaboration on this vitally important issue, and I thank the numerous members of this Committee who have joined us as co-sponsors, including Chairman Grijalva.

Providing federal funds for Indian programs a full year in advance will ensure that our nation can better meet its commitments to tribal nations. My bill, H.R. 1128, provides for advance appropriations for the BIA and BIE as well as the Indian Health Service.

Within the Interior Appropriations bill, we have already dedicated the resources over several years to achieve forward funding for some parts of the Bureau of Indian Education budget. But we simply don't have the ability to forward fund all of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service budgets. That is why I am coming to this Committee today to ask that you work

with us and the Budget Committee to hold hearings on the *Indian Programs Advanced Appropriations Act*.

Each year, the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee holds two days of public witness hearings with tribal leaders to hear about the funding priorities for Indian Country. This year, we heard over and over again about the priority of advanced appropriations for tribal nations. While government shutdowns are damaging to all of our communities, they disproportionately harm Native Americans because of the critical public services provided by the BIA, BIE, and IHS. These agencies provide the funds to operate tribal hospitals, schools, law enforcement and other basic community services.

We cannot allow the health and safety of tribal communities to be put at risk because the federal government can't finish its work.

We already have a model to look to where Congress provided advanced appropriations to better uphold its obligations. In 2009, Congress overwhelmingly passed legislation to provide the Veterans Health Administration with advance appropriations. We took that step to ensure our commitment to care for our veterans was supported with a stable budget even in uncertain political times. Now we need to show the same commitment to upholding our essential trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the time, and I look forward to working together with this Committee on this and many other priorities in the 116th Congress.